



Implementation Sites and Partners

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board:

Farview Park

Folwell Park

North Commons Park

City of Minneapolis

Department of Health and Family Support (MDHFS)
www.minneapolismn.gov/health

Made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Health.



Department of Health & Family Support



Communities Putting Prevention to Work
 Making healthy living easier.

Using Outreach Workers to Increase Perceptions of Safety and Park Use in North Minneapolis Parks

For many people, parks provide free open space for recreation and physical activity. Minneapolis has an extensive park system, and nearly all City residents live within six blocks of a park. However, not all residents feel comfortable using their parks because of the perception that some parks are unsafe. According to the Prevention Institute's 2010 report, *Addressing the intersection: Preventing violence and promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living*, "Violence and fear of violence cause people to be less physically active and spend less time outdoors." Therefore, concerns about personal safety at parks can affect park use, potentially reducing opportunities for physical activity for some people.

The Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support (the health department) has worked to address personal safety barriers at three large North Minneapolis parks as part of the Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) project. In the summers



of 2010 and 2011, the health department partnered with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) to hire park outreach staff at Farview, Folwell, and North Commons Parks (the 'intervention parks'). These 'StreetReach' staff served as a visible adult presence in the parks and promoted the parks to community members. The goal of the project was to increase perceptions of safety among community residents and to encourage people of all ages to safely and comfortably use their parks to engage in physical activity.

Activities

Through CPPW funding, StreetReach staff were active in the parks June through October of 2010 and 2011. In 2010, StreetReach staff targeted their attention toward youth ages 10-17. Seven staff conducted street outreach within and near the perimeters of parks, at events, and within park buildings with a special focus on engaging these youth and linking them with available park and community programs. In addition to engaging youth, the StreetReach staff also served as a visible adult presence to the community and provided supervision for the youth.

In 2011, the CPPW-funded StreetReach staff changed their focus to target families with young children. (A separate grant from the health department continued to fund outreach to youth). StreetReach staff conducted door-to-door outreach to households within a few blocks of each intervention park, promoting the parks as family-friendly spaces and inviting the community to Family Festivals held in each of the intervention parks in July - September 2011. StreetReach staff also used the festivals to engage residents and let them know of the physical activity opportunities available in parks for people of all ages.

The outcomes and impacts of this project

Activities (continued)

were evaluated in several ways:

- **Neighborhood surveys** – StreetReach staff conducted door-to-door surveys within approximately a 2-block radius of each of the intervention parks in June and October of 2010 and July and October of 2011. Surveys assessed park use, perceptions of park safety, and event attendance

- **Event surveys** – StreetReach staff conducted surveys at each of the Family Festivals in 2011 to gather feedback on the events and to learn how people heard about them
- **StreetReach debrief meetings** – Health department staff led meetings with StreetReach staff in October 2010 and 2011 to document the day-to-day work, successes, and challenges that they encountered

Results

Neighborhood surveys

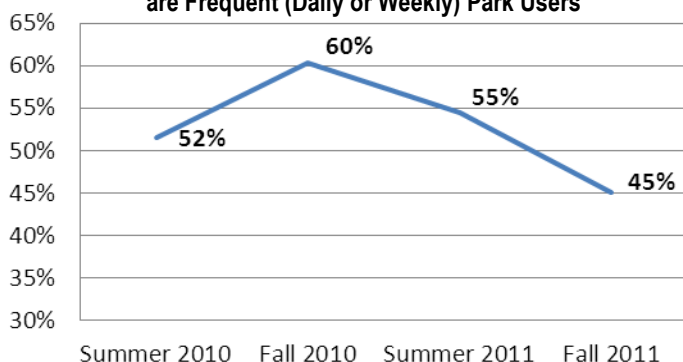
StreetReach staff conducted door-to-door surveys generally within a two block radius of each park, although the boundary varied somewhat for each survey administration. They tracked the number of households they visited, along with survey completions and refusals. During each survey administration, they completed an average of 138 surveys, with an average completion rate of 21%

The neighborhood survey data should be interpreted with caution, as the surveys were conducted with a non-random convenience sample and had low response rates. The different seasons in which the surveys were conducted (summer versus fall) may have influenced participant responses; this may have also resulted in systematic differences in the samples of survey respondents (e.g., parents with children who engage in after-school activities may be less likely to be home when StreetReach staff conducted surveys during the fall).

Park use

Between 45% and 60% of respondents reported being frequent park users; that is, they reported visiting their parks daily or weekly (see Figure 1). In the 2010 surveys, respondents most often reported using their parks for physical activity. The most common responses about park activities from the Fall 2010 survey included using the playground (47%), playing sports (42%), swimming (34%), dog walking (23%), teen/youth activities excluding sports (19%), computer access (18%), exercise, e.g., walking, jogging, biking (16%), and community meetings/events (14%).

Figure 1: % of Neighborhood Survey Respondents who are Frequent (Daily or Weekly) Park Users



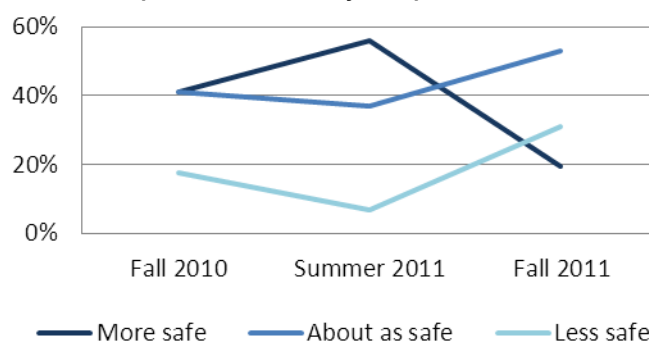
Perceptions of safety

In the Fall 2010, Summer 2011, and Fall 2011 surveys, respondents were asked how safe their parks were compared to the previous year. Between 72% (Fall 2011) and 93% (Summer 2010) of respondents thought that their parks were “as safe” or “safer” than they were last year. The number of respondents reporting that their parks were safer, however, dropped for the fall 2011 survey: only 20% said their park was safer than last year, compared to 41% in October 2010 and 56% in July 2011 (see Figure 2). This may have been because of differences in the non-random samples; in addition, residents’ perceptions of safety could have been influenced by acts of violence that occurred near some of the North Minneapolis parks in August 2011, including shootings of young teenagers. Respondents who thought their parks were less safe often cited violence, gangs, and fighting as the reason, saying things like, “[there has been] more shooting this summer, more kids getting shot,” providing further evidence that acts of violence in the community affected perceptions of safety.

Even though perceptions of safety may have been decreasing, respondent comments show that StreetReach staff may have been positively affecting perceptions of safety. Respondents who thought their parks were safer most often cited increased presence in the parks as a reason, sometimes specifically mentioning StreetReach staff. Respondents also felt that there was increased community awareness and involvement in preventing violence.

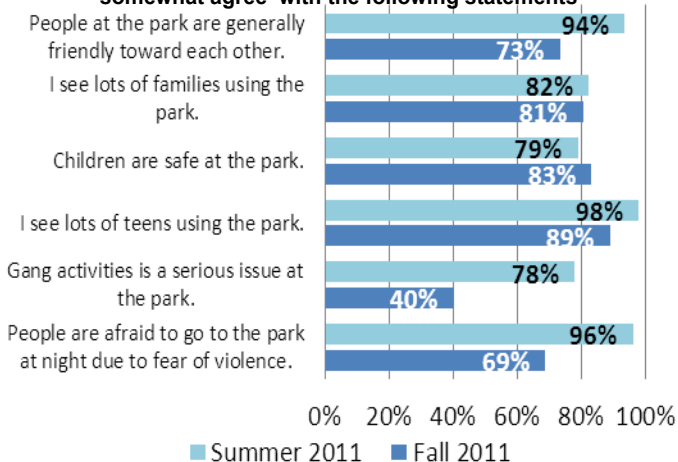
In both 2011 surveys, respondents were asked to rate the safety of their parks on a scale from 1 (completely

Figure 2: Neighborhood Survey Respondent Perceptions of Park Safety Compared to Last Year



Results (continued)

Figure 3: % of neighborhood survey respondents who 'agree' or 'somewhat agree' with the following statements



unsafe) to 10 (completely safe). Responses for both surveys were similar (average ratings of 5.9 in July 2011 and 5.6 in October 2011). Although residents' perceptions of park safety may have decreased, their absolute rating of safety appeared to change little over the course of the summer of 2011.

Respondents were also asked to rate the park environment (see Figure 3). Respondents thought that children were safe at parks; however, they were afraid to go to parks at night due to fear of violence, and many thought that gang activities were a serious issue.

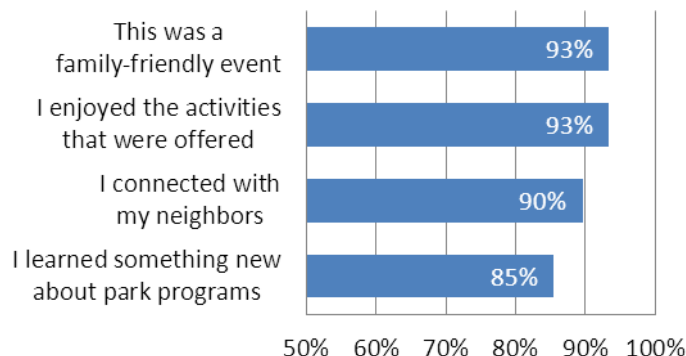
Suggestions for improvement

Respondents were asked what activities or events would meet the needs of the members of their household. Common suggestions included more community events, more youth programs, more sports programs/lessons, infrastructure improvements and more family activities.

Event surveys

StreetReach staff also surveyed attendees of the 2011 Family Festivals. Most respondents heard about the events through brochures (51%), StreetReach staff (20%), at the park itself (20%), or from a friend or relative (10%). Respondents enjoyed the events, learned something new about the parks, and were able to connect with neighbors (see Figure 4). Many festival goers already visited the parks frequently: 67% reported visiting their parks daily or weekly. About 8% of respondents had never been to the park before the event, so the events may have encouraged some people to visit the parks for the first time.

Figure 4: % of park event attendees who 'agree' or 'somewhat agree' with the following statements



StreetReach debriefs

In October of 2010 and 2011, health department staff members facilitated debrief conversations with StreetReach staff, who described their work, challenges, opportunities for improvement, and what made them successful in their roles. In 2010 they spent most of their time interacting with youth, helping them diffuse conflicts, troubleshoot problems, and connecting them to resources, especially jobs. They felt that they were most successful working with youth when they made themselves accessible without forcing interactions. They felt it was important for youth to see them regularly and in a variety of venues. StreetReach staff found the outreach conducted outside of the boundary of the parks to be especially challenging because that is where they encountered the most at-risk and difficult youth.

In 2011, StreetReach staff spent much of their time conducting door-to-door outreach to families and holding Family Festivals. They felt that the festivals were a good way to get people to come out to the park, to get information about park programs to residents, and to help neighbors connect with each other. Many community members showed interest in volunteering at the festivals and the StreetReach staff members were able to find opportunities for them to help out. StreetReach staff felt they had become a visible and recognizable presence in the parks. The matching staff t-shirts helped with recognition, but residents began to recognize staff even when they were not working.

Through their outreach efforts, StreetReach staff met a woman who cared for two of her grandchildren, both of whom had Down syndrome. Because of StreetReach staff encouragement, she brought her grandchildren to a Family Festival event at her neighborhood park. Prior to the event, she never visited the park near her house because she feared for her grandchildren's safety. However, she and her grandchildren had so much fun at the Family Festival that they went every festival for the rest of the summer – even festivals at parks outside of their neighborhood!

Key Lessons Learned

StreetReach staff was successful in many ways: they were well-recognized in the community, they raised awareness about park programs, and they got many residents to come out to park events. Through the neighborhood surveys, they learned that when North Minneapolis residents go to the parks, they are most often using them for physical activities like playing sports, walking their dogs, or swimming.

Despite these successes, acts of violence in the neighborhoods near parks may have impacted the results of the project evaluation and affected perceptions of safety among residents living near the parks. Neighborhood survey results showed that some residents believe that parks are unsafe, and their fears of violence may be a barrier to park use. These personal safety concerns may prevent parents from allowing their children to use the parks as well.

The impact of the acts of violence and the safety concerns of residents demonstrate the importance of continuing to address park safety through efforts like StreetReach. This project also highlights the importance of the intersection between violence prevention and obesity prevention: concerns about personal safety may prevent residents from using their parks for physical activity, biking and walking in their neighborhoods, or even accessing healthy foods at nearby stores and farmers markets. Obesity and violence prevention are both priorities of the health department and staff will continue to search for points of intersection on this work.

Sustainability and Future Plans

MPRB places a high priority on ensuring that community residents see their neighborhood parks as safe and accessible. Increasing park use is an important element of increasing park safety; as MPRB's superintendent, Jayne Miller said, "Parks are safe when people are in them."

Through its Youth Violence Prevention (YVP) program, the health department has continued to partner with the Park Board to fund StreetReach staff who will conduct outreach to youth, but this funding will be ending in early 2012. The YVP program will continue



its efforts to prevent violence in the city (including city parks) through its comprehensive strategic plan, *Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis*.

One strategy MPRB will use to continue this work regardless of funding will be to concentrate existing MPRB and community resources on a park-by-park basis to increase park safety and park use. MPRB plans to engage community partners located near the parks, such as faith-based and youth-serving organizations in these efforts. MPRB will seek additional funds from internal and external sources to support these activities, but will continue to address park safety and use regardless of future funding.

Resources

City of Minneapolis

To learn more about the health department's *Communities Putting Prevention to Work* initiative, visit: www.minneapolismn.gov/health/cppw

To learn more about the health department's *Youth Violence Prevention* initiative, visit: http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/yvp/dhfs_yv

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

To learn more about the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, visit: www.minneapolisparcs.org

Other Resources

To learn more about the intersection of violence and physical activity, view the Prevention Institute's report, *Addressing the intersection: Preventing violence and promoting healthy eating and physical activity*. The report is available at: <http://preventioninstitute.org/press/highlights/404-addressing-the-intersection.html>

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